

ECONOMY
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“Enabling Success”

A Consultation on a New Strategic Framework to Tackle Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland – Driving Social Change Through Economic Participation

Online Response Booklet

January 2014



Department for
Employment
and Learning
www.dfeirl.gov.uk



Department of
Enterprise, Trade
and Investment
www.detrni.gov.uk

Online Response Form

The responses to the consultation questions set out below will play an important role in the final development of 'Enabling Success – a Strategy to Tackle Economic Inactivity - Driving Social Change Through Economic Participation'.

Views are sought from all those with an interest in the issue.

This response document should be read in conjunction with following documents, all of which are available on the DEL and DETI websites –

- (1) Economic Inactivity Strategic Framework
- (2) Oral statement – Economic Inactivity Strategic Framework
- (3) Economic Inactivity – Baseline Study
- (4) Oral statement – Outcomes of the Baseline Analysis of Economic Inactivity
- (5) Economic Inactivity Strategic Framework – Public Consultation
- (6) Economic Inactivity Strategic Framework – Rural Proofing
- (7) Economic Inactivity Strategic Framework – Section 75 Equality Screening
- (8) Economic Inactivity Strategic Framework - Literature Review

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All consultation responses should be sent to:

Economic Inactivity Strategy Branch
Department for Employment and Learning
5th Floor
Gloucester House 57-
63 Chichester Street
Belfast
BT1 4RA

The closing date for consultation responses is 5pm on 17 April 2014.

For further information please contact:

Tel: (028) 902 52009

Email: economicinactivityconsultation@delni.gov.uk

The Departments cannot accept responses by telephone. General enquiry calls may however be made to the above number.

The following questions are designed to help structure the responses to the public consultation exercise_

NAME:	Ms Fiona Molloy
ORGANISATION: (if applicable)	South Belfast Partnership Board [SBPB]
EMAIL:	
TELEPHONE NUMBER:	
ADDRESS:	

Consultation Question 1: Target Groups of the Strategy
(see Consultation Question 1 - pg __)

1. To what extent would you agree that these are the most relevant target groups for the strategy to focus on?

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree Disagree Strongly disagree

✓	nor disagree	e
Please outline the rationale for your response in the box below		
The SBPB agrees with the target groups selected as a consequence of the high percentage of these groups present for the longest period of time within the population of the economically inactive.		
The experience of members in supporting these and similar groups in need who experience disadvantage and disconnection from economic independence results in a recognition of the myriad of structural barriers that impact upon the most disadvantaged of the population in the area.		
Across the South Belfast area there are pockets of high deprivation with a population low in qualifications and skills, lacking confidence and with reduced hope and motivation in their ability and opportunities to move to economic autonomy.		

Consultation Question 2: Factors affecting target groups
(see Consultation Question 2 – pg 2_)

2 (i) Of the factors highlighted, which do you think are the most important to focus upon to reduce levels of inactivity?

SBPB agree with the factors identified that impact on levels of economic activity and connection with a range of services and initiatives.

We agree that different factors impact to different degrees on the two target groups based on our experience of supporting and working with the target group population.

For those with family commitments there is a significant underlying barrier in their lack of **confidence** to believe in themselves and their ability to access and use opportunities to make the transition from economic inactivity. It is essential for this group that requirements to meet their needs provide **flexibility**, an understanding of childcare and other caring considerations and the impact of benefits upon their current and future lives alongside the need for skills development.

Understanding the barriers for those who are the long terms sick and disabled has to be set within the context of the response of the wider population to those within this target group, particularly by **employers** who may resist the notion of employing the longer term sick and those with disabilities..

SBPB believe that there is an urgent need to address the lack of awareness of the strengths and opportunities offered by this group when they are truly supported to enter and participate within a working environment.

The need to integrate the availability of support for health and well-being needs alongside the requirements to reduce levels of economic inactivity is essential.

2 (ii) Are there any additional factors that should be considered?

The SBPB believe that the lack of utilisation and resourcing of existing community based resources by service commissioners creates an additional barrier for the target group population. Often disconnected from statutory agencies and support the target groups need to be accessed at the earliest stage. This can be achieved utilising community and area based provision with providers who are most familiar with the needs and response requirements for the target groups.

Other barriers identified through the consultation event and referred to throughout this document include needs to:

- Receive accurate information on the skill requirements of employers with the skills offered by the target group
- Provision of a phased entry in to the world of work
- Flexible childcare provision and integration with the benefit system
- Flexible interventions that take account of creative and innovative approaches often designed by community and voluntary sector providers most knowledgeable of the barriers experienced by the target groups
- Focus on commissioning of resources to enable the requirements to meet the range and anticipated achievements linked to positive outcomes to be recognised. In particular, the importance of “soft skills” development to be understood as an essential requirement to increase the confidence and workplace competence needs of the target group population. In addition this allows for a clearer differentiation to be made between the development of employment and employability skills to meet the range of needs of the target groups and reflect the challenges they experience in making the transitions into and out of support provision as well as future employment

- Ensure that the capacity of employers is increased to engage successfully in the recruitment, development and retention of the target population within a work environment
-

Consultation Question 6: Proposals for Further Research

(see Consultation Question 6 – pg 3)

6. (i) Do you agree that the research projects outlined above are the key areas for further consideration?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

✓ Strongly
disagree

Please outline the rationale for your response in the box below:

Representatives from diverse communities of interest involved in the SBPB consultation had a number of concerns about the research proposals outlined in the document as outlined below.

- There is a risk of duplication given the plethora of previous research work carried out. We would advocate full use of the existing information as a starting point
- While regional research often carried out by academics and economic theorists is useful for policy makers it is suggested that more local information would be of greater benefit for an action planning response
- If research is to be commissioned can the timescale ensure that the recommendations and conclusions can be utilised in the short to medium terms to inform development, implementation and review?
- Attention needs to be paid to the specific skills set requirements on a city wide/ area basis that matches the needs of employers and emerging market opportunities. Similarly “simpler” commissions that involve local database collation and employer /key stakeholder surveys could be of benefit
- Investment in a shared management information system that can be used by providers/ commissioning agents and other stakeholders would assist greatly for information sharing, data collection and statistical analysis.

The bottom line for the representatives at the SBPB consultation was expressed succinctly by one representative who asked “is the research commissioned a step towards job creation”?

6. (ii) What other areas of research may be beneficial to consider and why?

Local city and area wide surveys and information that can be utilised for action planning
Specific analysis of current and existing skills needs

Consultation Question 8: Current provision and support available to address economic inactivity
(see Consultation Question 8 – pg 3_)

8. (i) Which existing government service(s) work well in your opinion and why?

- Existing partnerships supported by a range of government Departments and agencies are working well, showing “green shoots” of integrated working. This includes the current Economic Forum in South Belfast where sub groups and the Forum as a whole feel they contribute to strategic economic development as well as information action and response. Similar positive responses were made in regard to Neighbourhood Renewal and local government capacity building initiatives.
- Step Ahead and Ledcom Advance programmes were viewed positively as is the forthcoming opportunities presented through the South Belfast Social Enterprise Hub.

8. (ii) What are the main barriers to accessing existing government services and why?

Timelines in terms of outputs and outcomes that are too short term considering the barriers experienced by individuals within the target groups and the required medium to longer term outcomes required to assist transition are not helpful

The retail traders’ representative highlighted the barriers that exist for their members who have neither time nor resources to engage with wider government initiatives and the experience of their members that some don’t even know where to begin. While a strategy and dedicated resourcing might be in place it is neither effective nor efficient if there is no engagement with the “right” employers who can provide jobs in the area and on a city wide basis given that the bulk of the private sector employers are SME’s.

The Online Job Centre was identified as a particularly poor website for practical use.

In terms of competitive tendering reference was made to the barriers that exist for local service providers to meet some of the procurement requirements when they are perhaps best places to identify local need, successful engagement responses and have a complex cultural understanding of the individuals, groups and communities in an area.

A similar point was made in relation to the need to have “culturally competent” government agencies, staff and service providers to ensure that resources are better targeted. The monies need to be better targeted.

8. (iii) How can existing government services be linked more effectively to make them more user friendly and accessible to the customer?

- There is a need to place more emphasis on the destination as well as the entry point for the target group members. The involvement and capacity building of employers is essential in order to match employment opportunities with skills development.
- Similarly a website that could advertise jobs for free and that would provide an updated view of the labour market in the area and the “pen pics” of potential employees assisted and assted by service providers would be useful. .The Third Sector Community NI site is a good example of how this can assist employers and potential employees.
- There is a need for an integrated wraparound service – the one stop shop indicated earlier to support employers as well as providers and potential employees. Employers are also the “customers” for this framework
- Use of a shared database would be helpful and resource efficient including shared outcomes
- It is crucial that the context and impact of physical and mental health issues on the target groups, potential and existing employers and service providers is recognised in the development and implementation of government services.
- Existing initiatives that respond to health inequalities , the co-relationship with structural issues such as poverty and disadvantage and emerging initiatives such as the Family Support Hubs need to continue to be integrated into a wrap -around service that is complementary to economic inactivity initiatives
- Simpler rather than over complicated processes with clear pathways to information and assistance for all underpinned by robust awareness raising is essential.

9 (ii) What specific proposals should be considered for pilot project testing and why?

The SBPB considered that there was no need to start “pilot testing” with a “blank document” Build upon a review and learning from current programmes capturing the elements that contributed to increased success and reducing those that resulted in challenge and risk for success. In terms of scalability if it works then it should be extended. Programmes such as LEMIS, Steps to Work and Steps to Success were also discussed. Existing needs should be the driver to inform any new pilot programmes.

Reference was made to the best practice model for engagement with the target groups carried out through the Glasgow Works initiative. A dedicated worker was available within health centre and mental health settings who could address challenges and opportunities in regard to the employability of the individual. This resulted in referrals from primary health care providers to other social partners concerned with employment opportunities.

At least one pilot project [preferably in South Belfast] that identifies specific needs, responses and addresses a mentoring and assistance service for employers in SME including retail and social enterprises.

10. (ii) How should an employer subsidy be weighted in terms of the different target inactive groups and existing subsidy schemes?

The SBPB agrees with the need for incentives for employers and suggests that part of such an incentive may not involve money but opportunities to assist employers in capacity building that will impact positively upon their engagement with the target groups including

- Opportunities for employers perhaps to engage supervisors and /or to develop their own skills to support the target groups
- Guidance to match skills with opportunities for both employer and employees
- Assistance with the development of quality management systems and process for smaller employers can be factored into the subsidy. This would provide a win-win situation for any small –medium employer including retailers and social entrepreneurs.

Another suggestion was that larger employers including statutory agencies make available the services of their occupational health services to smaller employers as an incentive to reduce the costs and challenges in dealing with sickness and ill health thereby providing Value for Money. It would be of particular assistance to individuals who are economically inactive as a result of long terms sickness and disability.

10. (iii) How should an employer subsidy be structured to ensure that it promotes sustained employment for the target inactive groups?

The discussion at the SBPB consultation event referred to the definition of 'sustained employment' i.e. is this for a time period currently that can be inconsistent across various schemes from 13- 26 weeks. The group were concerned about the potential of a "revolving door" culture that proves little "sustained" employment for some individuals with some employers

One representative commented that a subsidy had been effective in providing the time and opportunity to convince their Board to invest in sustained employment beyond the period of the original subsidy supported initiative

10. (iv) Do you agree that a guaranteed employment and skills progression route for the target inactive groups should be integral to an employer subsidy incentive scheme?

The SBPB communities of interest represented at the consultation event discussed in a similar way to the point above as to what is the definition of guaranteed employment. The consistency and the shared understanding of language used is crucial, particularly in terms of the significant commitment and expectations held by employers and the target group as to the context and results from guaranteed employment.

At the SBPB consultation event there was agreement that the skills progression route needed to include softer skills including those within the emotional intelligence framework in order to enable the individuals in the target group to increase their resilience to deal with the long term impact of economic inactivity and their employability within a work setting.

9. (v) What other stipulations for employers accessing such a subsidy should be considered?

Basic quality management requirements for individuals from target groups engaging with work. This could include accurate job descriptions reflecting the employer needs and expectations, positive interviewing and selection process, induction and ongoing support and development
See point above @ 10.2

10. (vi) What other alternative incentives could be considered in lieu of an employer subsidy?

The SBPB suggests that rates relief is a massive issue particularly for smaller employers and would be a significant attractor in lieu of and/ or in tandem with a reduced financial incentive.

Upskilling opportunities for existing staff e.g. access to management qualifications was also discussed as an option.

10. (vii) What types of in-work support could be provided to both the employer and the individual to help promote sustained employment for the target inactive groups?

Ongoing contact from service provider with employer and employee to review progress to date and to assist with information and signposting to additional support for the future while that be ongoing development opportunities; graduated incentives linked to skills and growth opportunities as indicated previously.

Easier access to the support and information in whatever format that the incentives take. Back to the "wraparound" assistance and mentoring from pre-entry point for the individuals through transitions to sustained employment opportunities

Reaching out: Connecting Older People programme and have an active group of participants engaging in various initiatives

- More use of radio as older people can be a significant audience profile for this media
- Extend the range of groups targeted for awareness raising to include for example Women's and Family Support groups; men's Sheds projects and similar initiatives founded through charitable funders such as the Community Foundation NI, BIG Lottery projects [BIG itself has an excellent PR Unit who may be able to offer space in their promotional magazine, Church organisations and ex-combatant support groups. Recent research undertaken in the South Belfast area [Shoulder to Shoulder] highlighted the range of needs for older individuals disengaged from support and assistance

11 (iii) Which key delivery partners should be considered to ensure that the impact of the public awareness campaign is maximised?

- Voluntary and community sector representatives that are working within communities including those who specifically work for and with target groups
 - Statutory and public sector agencies that plan and provide services for older people and for employers
 - Belfast City Council
 - SBPB Economic Forum and similar in other areas across region
 - Business in the Community
 - Social Enterprise Hubs and enterprise centres
 - Neighbourhood Partnership members and advisors
- [See points made above @ 11.2

11. (iv) What new measures should be considered to raise awareness levels of mental health issues in the workplace?

The SBPB agrees that new and innovative measures need to be utilised to raise awareness of mental health issues in the workplace

The work undertaken by the cross departmental strategic group in auditing policy responses in the workplace to domestic violence and enabling local area partnerships to implement mechanisms to develop this further in local workplaces including Health Trusts, Police, private and third sector employers is a useful model to take forward to inform similar campaign in regard to mental health issues in the workplace. Initiatives included policy development, tips on 'dos and don'ts' for employers, awareness raising and management, support training to develop responses and use of dedicated work champions to promote the key messages within the workplace.

Range of information in various formats that includes information on debt, safety at home and which could be expanded to include safety in the workplace for those affected currently or in the past by mental health issues.

It is crucial that relationships and engagement are built with the target group at an earlier stage as indicated in the previous points on Breaking the Cycle.

Ensure that the public campaigns are targeted with specific information to meet need and are output related

11. (v) Which key delivery partners should be considered to ensure that the impact of these new measures is maximised?

The SBPB believes that the key partners outlined in 11.2 + 11.3 should be considered. It is noted however that the Careers Service is missing which does not promote a positive message for older workers and the long term unemployed that a “career”, rather than simply a “job” is accessible and available to them

Consultation Question 12: Breaking the Cycle

(see Consultation Question 12 – pg 5_)

12. (i) Do you agree that better integration of health and work services is the key preventative measure for reducing in-flows into the target inactive groups?

Strongly agree

Agree ✓

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly
disagree

Please outline the rationale for your response in the box below:

The SBPB agrees that the better integration of health and work services is essential for prevention, earlier intervention and to better inform support and assistance initiatives.

12. (iv) Who should be represented on the expert panel?

As indicated previously we believe that “expert” service users should be utilised to inform the planning, ongoing review and monitoring. In addition the Careers Service and DENI need also to be included

12. (v) What other key preventative measures should be considered to reduce in-flows into the target inactive groups?

Regular monitoring and review is essential. The evaluation of current initiatives such as NEETS, have information that could be utilised to better influence preventative issues. Other suggestions are indicated in Questions 8, 9 + 10.

Consultation Question 13: Conclusions
(see Consultation Question 13 – pg 58)

13. (i) In addition to the approach outlined in the consultation document, what other ways are there to effectively reduce economic inactivity in Northern Ireland in a sustainable and affordable way?

- Promotion of a Living Wage
- Address the Black Economy
- Understand and respond to the necessity to make a value proposition to the individual
-

13. (ii) What should be the top three priorities for the NI Executive to effectively reduce economic inactivity?

Greater awareness for target groups at every stage of the information available on where they might perhaps see their skills set develop over 5 years to match emerging employment opportunities.

Downscale from regional to local area approach utilising existing partnerships that will not duplicate or reinvent achievements to date and that can utilise essential local knowledge and expertise. (Wraparound one stop shop approach)

Focus on graduate opportunities in tandem. When graduates are taking up lower skills positions it creates a mismatch for them and potentially “blocks “ jobs for the target groups identified in the strategic framework

13. (iii) In terms of prioritisation of government spending, do you feel that tackling economic inactivity should be a key spending area?

Yes

The SBPB wholeheartedly endorses the need to resource the tackling of economic inactivity as a key area. Without it the key elements of the overall Programme for Government is unlikely to be achieved and the structural and endemic barriers that result in multiple deprivations including poverty of health and inequalities are unlikely to be reduced.

13. (iv) The working title of the strategy is “Enabling Success – Driving Social Change Through Economic Participation – A Strategy to Tackle Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland” - do you consider this title adequately encapsulates the purpose of the strategy?

Yes ✓

No

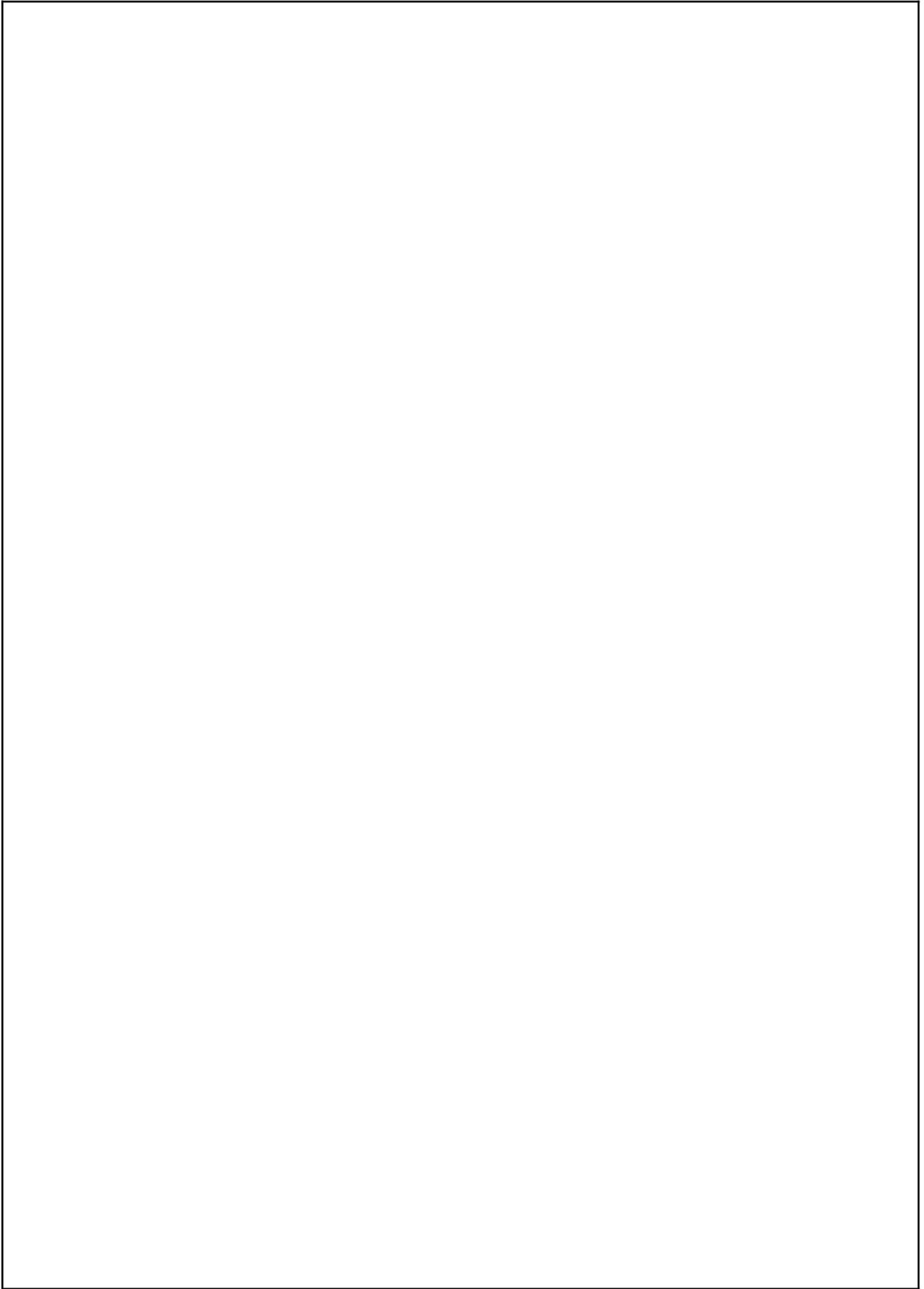
Please outline any alternative titles in the box below:

13. (v) Please outline any other comments you may have that have not been specifically addressed elsewhere in the consultation document.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide additional comments as requested in the text above.

Additional Information

- (i) Please use this section as a continuation of any previous responses as required. Please clearly state the consultation question number in each instance.



6XEPLW_(RXU_)RUP

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